

SERIAL PRESENCE DETECT DRIVEN  
MEMORY CLOCK CONTROL

Background of the Invention

This invention relates to memory clock  
5 control in a computer circuit that includes memory.  
More particularly, this invention relates to memory  
clock control based on information contained within the  
memory itself.

Timing budgets are especially important in  
10 the design of a computer system. To operate the  
computer system at a certain clock rate, many transfers  
of data have to be completed within a clock period.  
The timing budget is the allocation of that clock  
period to various delay components in each data  
15 transfer. The timing budget may include items such as  
setup time, clock skew, and propagation delay.

A computer system typically includes a CPU  
(central processing unit), which may be a  
microprocessor, and at least one memory controller  
20 which controls communications between the  
microprocessor and various memory components.  
Conventionally, memory controllers are coupled to the  
microprocessor with a system bus. In turn, the memory  
controllers provide memory components with a memory

address/data bus and a memory clock which usually run at the same speed as the system bus or at a fixed multiple of the system bus.

Typically, the maximum speed of the memory address/data bus decreases as the number of memory components increases. This increase is caused by, among other things, an increase in propagation delay because of additional capacitive loading. Memory controllers are generally set to output a memory clock having a speed compatible with the maximum number of memory components that can be coupled to the microprocessor. In some applications, the speed of the memory components may change dynamically, thereby creating the need for a memory controller to change the speed of its operating address/data bus dynamically. Therefore, operating the memory controller at a speed compatible with the actual number and characteristics of memory components, such as speed, may be advantageous. Often, this is not being done.

Furthermore, memory component manufacturers usually incorporate serial presence detect EEPROMs (electrically eraseable programmable read only memories) into memory components. These EEPROMs store data such as memory size, memory type, memory features, manufacturer identification, and other information related to the memory components. Currently this stored data is not being used to set the speed of the memory address/data bus and memory clock.

In view of the foregoing, it would be desirable to provide a memory controller that selects the speed of the memory address/data bus and memory

clock based on data identifying memory components which are stored in serial presence detect EEPROMs.

#### Summary of the Invention

It is an object of this invention to provide  
5 a memory controller that selects the speed of the memory address/data bus and memory clock based on data identifying memory components which are stored in serial presence detect EEPROMs.

In accordance with the present invention, the  
10 operating speed of a memory interface in a computer system is selectable by a memory controller that determines the number and other characteristics of memory modules. The operating speed is selectable by providing the memory controller with clocks of varying  
15 frequencies, or by generating within the memory controller, clocks of varying frequencies. Upon initialization of the computer system, the memory controller uses serial presence detect EEPROMs, which are commonly coupled to each memory module to uniquely  
20 access each memory module, to verify the presence of each memory module. Preferably, a clock with the most optimal frequency is selected in accordance with data stored in the serial presence detect EEPROMs. In one embodiment, for example, if less than a maximum number  
25 of memory modules are present, the memory controller selects a higher frequency clock to drive the memory modules during regular operation.

#### Brief Description of the Drawings

30 The above and other objects and advantages of the invention will be apparent upon consideration of

the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like reference characters refer to like parts throughout, and in which:

5               FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a typical computer system;

              FIG. 2 is a flow chart of a preferred embodiment of a memory module initialization process according to the present invention;

10             FIG. 3 is a block diagram of a preferred embodiment of a memory controller coupled to memory modules according to the present invention;

              FIG. 4 is a block diagram of another preferred embodiment of a memory controller coupled to  
15 memory modules according to the present invention;

              FIG. 5 is a flow chart of a preferred embodiment of a memory module count process according to the present invention; and

              FIG. 6 is a block diagram of a preferred  
20 embodiment of a memory controller that generates multiple clock signals according to the present invention.

#### Detailed Description of the Invention

              The present invention selects the speed of a  
25 computer system's memory address/data bus and memory clock by using information obtained from serial presence detect EEPROMs present on memory modules. Generally, there is a serial presence detect EEPROM corresponding to each memory module. In typical PC  
30 (personal computer) applications, for example, a microprocessor boots up by accessing data from a boot

ROM (Read Only Memory) such as flash memory. The microprocessor then initializes the memory controller by programming its registers.

The initialization of the memory controller is part of the BIOS (Basic Input/Output System) usually contained within the boot ROM. During the execution of the BIOS, the memory controller can be programmed with memory module parameters from the boot ROM. These memory module parameters can include the BIOS image of the types and configurations of the memory components which do not reflect the exact numbers, types, and configuration of the memory modules. However, in accordance with the present invention, the exact numbers, types, and configuration of the memory components can be detected directly by accessing serial presence detect EEPROMs incorporated in the memory components.

In a first embodiment of the present invention, a memory controller is coupled to memory modules which incorporate serial presence detect EEPROMs. Each serial presence detect EEPROM is coupled to the memory controller with a common clock line and a unique bi-directional data line. Alternatively, the serial presence detect EEPROMs can be coupled with a common bi-directional data line and a single clock line.

During the initialization of the memory controller, the memory controller checks for the presence of memory modules by transmitting a start sequence to each of the serial presence detect EEPROMs. For each memory module present in the system, an

acknowledgment is sent by the serial present detect EEPROM to the memory controller.

In accordance with this embodiment of the present invention, one memory module is counted for each acknowledgment of the memory controller's transmitted start sequence. The actual number of memory modules coupled to the memory controller is counted. Consequently, the number of unique bi-directional data lines of the memory controller should equal a maximum number of memory modules that may be coupled to the controller.

In conjunction with the counting of the memory modules, the memory controller can also determine characteristics of the memory modules by reading manufacturer-supplied information from the serial detect presence EEPROMs. The manufacturer-supplied information may include the maximum operating speed of the memory module. When the memory controller has gathered all the pertinent information, it can preferably determine an optimal operating speed for the memory address/data bus.

Generally, memory controllers derive memory module clocks from a system clock provided by an off-chip oscillator or by the microprocessor. A phase-locked loop is often used to generate a specific clock required by the memory modules. In accordance with the present invention, memory module clocks of different frequencies can be generated by phase-locked loops and provided to a multiplexer. When the memory controller has determined an operating speed for the memory address/data bus, the multiplexer can be programmed to

output the most appropriate memory module clock for the memory address/data bus.

In a second embodiment of the invention, each serial presence detect EEPROM is coupled to a memory  
5 controller with a common clock line and a common bi-directional data line. Each serial presence detect EEPROM may have address lines which are connected in a different binary bit pattern for each EEPROM, such that each memory module may be provided with a unique  
10 address.

During initialization of the memory controller, the memory controller checks for the presence of memory modules by transmitting a start sequence containing a unique address to each of the  
15 serial presence detect EEPROMs. For each corresponding memory module present in the system, an acknowledgment is sent by the serial presence detect EEPROM to the memory controller.

Once the number of memory modules has been  
20 counted by the memory controller, the memory controller preferably chooses an optimal operating speed of the memory modules. A memory module clock is then generated and provided to the memory modules as described, for example, in the first embodiment of the  
25 present invention.

FIG. 1 shows a typical personal computer system 100. Note that the present invention is not limited to personal computer systems, but is applicable to computer systems in general. Microprocessor 102 is  
30 preferably coupled to memory controller 106 with system bus 104. Note also that in some computer systems, the memory controller may be built into the CPU. Memory

controller 106 may include memory module interface 108 and boot ROM interface 118. Boot ROM interface 118 enables microprocessor 102 to access data on boot ROM 114. Data from ROM 114 are preferably transferred to microprocessor 102 via boot ROM address/data bus 120 and system bus 104. Memory interface 108 enables microprocessor 102 to access data from and write data to memory modules 110, each of which incorporates serial presence detect EEPROM 112. Data from and to memory modules 110 are preferably transferred to and from microprocessor 102 via memory address/data bus 116.

FIG. 2 shows an initialization process of memory modules 110 in accordance with the present invention. Initialization starts with the microprocessor powering up at step 204. Microprocessor 102 typically accesses instructions and other data from boot ROM 114 at step 206. Microprocessor 102 then uses that data to initialize memory controller 106 at step 208. As part of the initialization of memory controller 106, memory controller 106 accesses serial presence detect EEPROMs 112 at step 210. Memory controller 106 determines the number and types of memory modules 110 at step 212. Before ending the initialization of memory modules 110 at step 214, memory controller 106 selects an appropriate memory module clock at step 212 to be provided to memory modules 110.

In one embodiment, the memory controller compares the actual number and types of memory modules against a look-up table preferably contained within the memory controller. The look-up table can



include, for example, numbers and types of memory modules corresponding to appropriate memory clock frequencies. For example, if the memory controller detects two 8-component SDRAM (Synchronous Dynamic Random Access Memory) modules, it can look that up in its look-up table and find a corresponding operating clock speed of, for example, 100 MHz. If the number of modules is four instead of two, the memory controller may instead find a corresponding operating clock speed of 83 MHz in its look-up table.

FIG. 3 shows in more detail an embodiment of serial presence detect EEPROMs 112 coupled to memory controller 106. Memory controller 302 is coupled to serial presence detect EEPROMs 310 of respective memory modules 308 by common clock line 306 and unique bi-directional data lines 304 and 312. The roles of common clock line 306 and data lines 304 can be advantageously reversed such that a single bi-directional common data line and unique clock lines will not change the functionality of the present invention.

FIG. 4 shows in more detail another embodiment of serial presence detect EEPROMs 112 coupled to memory controller 106. In this embodiment, memory controller 402 is coupled to serial presence detect EEPROMs 406 of memory modules 408 with common clock line 410 and common bi-directional data line 404. Each serial presence detect EEPROM 406 has a unique address identifier provided by coupling address lines 412 alternately to ground and a power supply rail to produce unique bit patterns.

The embodiments of FIGS. 3 and 4 show that each serial presence detect EEPROM, and thus each memory module, engages in one-to-one communication with a suitably coupled memory controller. This, in turn, enables a memory controller to count each memory module and to identify other memory module characteristics.

Other characteristics useful in determining an operating clock frequency include the number of components in a memory module, the manufacturer, the speed grade of the memory module or its components, the type of memory module, and the physical layout of printed board circuit connections between the memory controller and the memory module.

FIG. 5 shows a flow chart of a memory module count process performed by the memory controller. Variables i and j are set to zero and one, respectively. Counting starts with the transmitting of a start sequence to module i at step 502. Module i should respond in a predetermined amount of time during which the memory controller waits at step 504. If there is an acknowledgment of the start sequence at step 506, then the memory controller increments variable j at step 508, which is a running total of the number of counted memory modules. If there is no acknowledgment of the start sequence at step 506, the memory controller proceeds to step 510. At step 510, the memory controller determines whether module i is the last module. The memory controller knows the maximum number of memory modules attachable to itself and compares this number to variable i. If module i is the last module, the process ends at step 514. If not, variable i is incremented by one at step 512, before

memory controller starts again at step 502 with next  
module  $i$ , where  $i = i + 1$ . Once the memory controller  
has determined the number and type of memory modules  
coupled to itself, the memory controller preferably  
5 determines the maximum operating speed.

FIG. 6 shows an embodiment of the present  
invention in which memory controller 602 preferably  
includes phase-locked loops (PLLs) 604 and 606 to  
generate clocks of two standard frequencies -- 100 MHz  
10 and 133 MHz. These clocks are input to  
multiplexer 608. Memory module clock 614 is output  
from multiplexer 608 and has a frequency of 100 MHz  
or 133 MHz, depending on the results of the counting  
process shown in FIG. 5. Note that memory  
15 controller 602 can have more than two PLLs for  
generating clocks of other frequencies.

Generally, if there are fewer memory modules  
coupled to memory controller 602, a higher frequency  
memory module clock 614 is chosen. Other factors which  
20 may be considered include the type of memory module and  
the capacitive load each memory module presents. In  
addition to the selection of a preferably optimal  
memory module clock as shown in FIG. 6, the entire  
memory address/data bus is preferably run at the same  
25 rate as the selected memory module clock.

Thus it is seen that memory module clocks can  
be selected based on information stored in serial  
presence detect EEPROMs. One skilled in the art will  
appreciate that the present invention can be practiced  
30 by other than the described embodiments, which are  
presented for purposes of illustration and not of

limitation, and the present invention is limited only by the claims which follow.

100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350 351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398 399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419 420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433 434 435 436 437 438 439 440 441 442 443 444 445 446 447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461 462 463 464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522 523 524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 544 545 546 547 548 549 550 551 552 553 554 555 556 557 558 559 560 561 562 563 564 565 566 567 568 569 570 571 572 573 574 575 576 577 578 579 580 581 582 583 584 585 586 587 588 589 590 591 592 593 594 595 596 597 598 599 600 601 602 603 604 605 606 607 608 609 610 611 612 613 614 615 616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623 624 625 626 627 628 629 630 631 632 633 634 635 636 637 638 639 640 641 642 643 644 645 646 647 648 649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656 657 658 659 660 661 662 663 664 665 666 667 668 669 670 671 672 673 674 675 676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683 684 685 686 687 688 689 690 691 692 693 694 695 696 697 698 699 700 701 702 703 704 705 706 707 708 709 710 711 712 713 714 715 716 717 718 719 720 721 722 723 724 725 726 727 728 729 730 731 732 733 734 735 736 737 738 739 740 741 742 743 744 745 746 747 748 749 750 751 752 753 754 755 756 757 758 759 760 761 762 763 764 765 766 767 768 769 770 771 772 773 774 775 776 777 778 779 780 781 782 783 784 785 786 787 788 789 790 791 792 793 794 795 796 797 798 799 800 801 802 803 804 805 806 807 808 809 810 811 812 813 814 815 816 817 818 819 820 821 822 823 824 825 826 827 828 829 830 831 832 833 834 835 836 837 838 839 840 841 842 843 844 845 846 847 848 849 850 851 852 853 854 855 856 857 858 859 860 861 862 863 864 865 866 867 868 869 870 871 872 873 874 875 876 877 878 879 880 881 882 883 884 885 886 887 888 889 890 891 892 893 894 895 896 897 898 899 900 901 902 903 904 905 906 907 908 909 910 911 912 913 914 915 916 917 918 919 920 921 922 923 924 925 926 927 928 929 930 931 932 933 934 935 936 937 938 939 940 941 942 943 944 945 946 947 948 949 950 951 952 953 954 955 956 957 958 959 960 961 962 963 964 965 966 967 968 969 970 971 972 973 974 975 976 977 978 979 980 981 982 983 984 985 986 987 988 989 990 991 992 993 994 995 996 997 998 999 1000